

SELKIRK
SETTLERS
IN REAL LIFE

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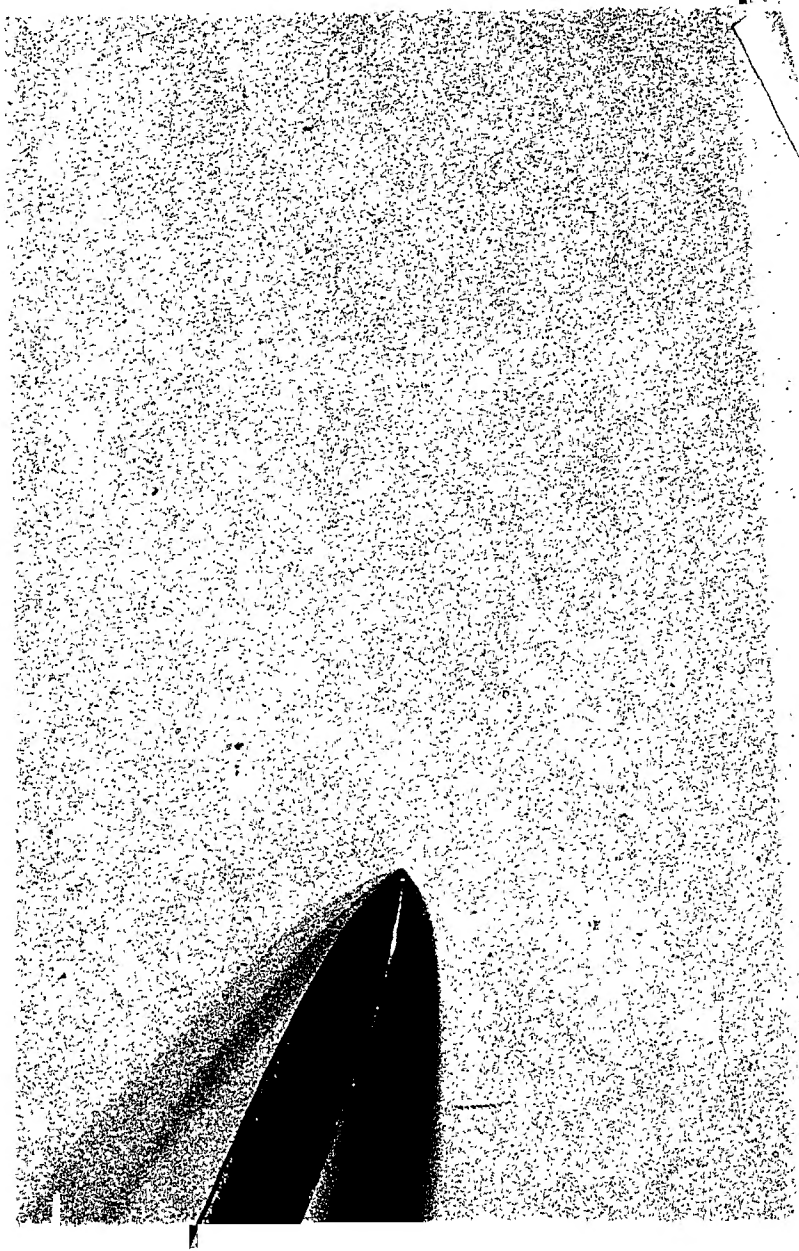
R. G. MACBETH, M.A.



KILDONAN CHURCH.

Built in 1853, under the ministry of Rev. John Black.





THE SELKIRK SETTLERS IN REAL LIFE.

BY

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WITH INTRODUCTION BY

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TORONTO:

WILLIAM BRIGGS.

MONTREAL: C. W. COATES.

HALIFAX: S. F. HUESTIS.

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PREFACE.

IN common with others who have been interested in, and connected with, the development of the territories formerly under the administration of the Hudson Bay Company, I heard with much pleasure of the intention of my friend, the Rev. R. G. MacBeth, M.A., to place on record an account of the genesis and development of the Selkirk Settlement in the Red River Valley. The longer such a work is postponed the more difficult must it be to carry out, and it would be a thousand pities if a description of the pioneer attempts at colonization in the great North-West were not given to the world. This is neither the time nor the place to enter upon a discussion of the motives which influenced Lord Selkirk in his enterprise. He may have been somewhat in advance of the times in which he lived, but he had the courage of his convictions, and his efforts deserve the fullest recognition from those who believe in the great future in store for Western Canada.

Looking back to the period when the movement was initiated, it is not surprising, in view of the then comparative inaccessibility of the country, or of the inexperience of the settlers of the climatic and other conditions then obtaining, and of other circumstances, that for

many years the progress of the Settlement was retarded. There can be no doubt, however, that its gradual development had an important bearing, both directly and indirectly, on the events which led to the surrender of the Charter of the Hudson Bay Company, and to the acquisition of Rupert's Land by Canada, through the Imperial Government.

It has been the custom to describe the Hudson Bay Company as an opponent of individual settlement and of colonization. To enter into a controversy on this point is not my purpose, but it may be proper to state that the condition of affairs at the time in question in the country between Lake Superior and the Rocky Mountains, does not appear to have been sufficiently appreciated. Owing to the difficulties of access and egress, colonization in what is now Manitoba and the North-West Territories could not have taken place successfully to any extent. Of necessity, also, the importation of the commodities required in connection with its agricultural development would have been exceptionally expensive, while, on the other hand, the cost of transportation of its possible exports must have been so great as to render competition with countries more favorably situated at the moment, difficult, if not impossible. The justice of these contentions will be at once realized, when it is remembered that the Red River Valley was situated in the centre of the continent, one thousand miles away in any direction from settled districts. Events, however, were shaping themselves all the time, in no uncertain way, and when the proper moment arrived, the great North-West was thrown open to settlement, railway communication became assured, and the country has since progressed, in view of all the circumstances, in a remarkable manner. Person-

PREFACE.

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ally, it is my opinion, that the acquisition and development of the Hudson Bay Territory was impossible prior to the confederation of the Dominion. No less a body than united Canada could have acquired and administered so large a domain, or have undertaken the construction of railways, without which its development could only have been slow and uncertain. It was not till 1878, eight years after the transfer, that Winnipeg first received railway communication through the United States. Three or four more years elapsed before the completion of the line to Lake Superior, and it was only late in 1885—sixteen years after the Hudson Bay Company relinquished their Charter—that the Canadian Pacific Railway was completed from ocean to ocean, and Manitoba and the North-West Territories were placed in direct and regular railway communication with the different parts of the Dominion. There is no question, also, that the policy of the Hudson Bay Company in regard to the Indians, and the intercourse which the aborigines had been accustomed to with its officers, made the transfer infinitely easier than would have otherwise been possible. In fact, it may be said that the Hudson Bay Company, while conserving its own interests, as long as was desirable, yet prepared the way for the Dominion, and for the colonization and settlement which is now taking place.

The record of the real life of the Selkirk settlers will be especially interesting to the inhabitants of the various Provinces of the Dominion, to the early settlers in Manitoba and the North-West, and to those millions who are destined to follow them in the future, and establish for themselves happy and comfortable homes on the grand western prairies. Many of the original Selkirk settlers and their descendants have been personally and intimately

known to me, including one of the most respected of the pioneers, the father of Mr. MacBeth; and I have always respected and admired their sterling qualities of head and heart. I know how they have worked and how they have lived, and, in my judgment, Manitoba owes more to their efforts and to their example than is generally admitted, or can well be conceived by the present generation of Canadians. One illustration of their simple character and honesty occurs to me at the moment of writing. Nothing further was required of them, in connection with the transfer of land, than a personal appearance before the Registrar, and an oral intimation of the transaction to be effected. No deeds or documents were completed in such cases, and no conveyance of the kind was ever questioned. Lord Selkirk is represented to have said that in the Red River Valley alone there is room for many millions of people. More modern authorities claim that the prairies are destined to provide homes for as many millions as now inhabit the United States. The extension of the railways in the different parts of the country is opening up yearly more extended fields for settlement, is providing the facilities for placing families all over the country, and for marketing the produce they will be enabled to raise. All these results may be traced to the Selkirk Settlement, and to the Hudson Bay Company, and they will tend to give additional interest to the entertaining and instructive volume Mr. MacBeth has written, for which I venture to predict a wide circulation.

DONALD A. SMITH.

VICTORIA CHAMBERS,
LONDON, ENG.

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 ERRATA.

Page 83, line 10—after “Alexander Ross,” read “James A. Murray.”

Page 100, line 16—after “long distances,” read “on horse-back.”

THE SELKIRK SETTLERS IN REAL LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

HISTORIES of Manitoba and the North-West exist in plenty, and the number is being constantly added to as the growing importance of the country attracts the attention of the world. The work of recording the leading historical facts concerning the West has been so ably and so exhaustively done by such men as Ross, Gunn, Hargrave, Bryce, Begg and others, that the present writer would not, under ordinary circumstances, attempt to add anything in the same line to what has been already written. But it has for years seemed to him, as the son

of a Selkirk settler, born and brought up amid the primitive life and the simple surroundings of this "Western Acadia," that very little, if anything, has been made public of the altogether unique and peculiar life and customs characteristic of those who for nearly half a century, apart from the rest of the world, fought and conquered the difficulties of settlement in a wilderness wild. More than once has he resolved to essay this unwritten chapter in the history of his birthplace, and more than once have friends, old and new, urged the task upon him; but the fear of failing to do adequate justice to the work has up to this date laid an arresting hand upon his pen. He feels that this lost chapter should have been written years ago by some one to whom the life to be depicted was less than a memory and more of an actual experience than it has been to him. But alas! no one undertook the work, and as the time goes by, the fear that it may never be touched at all becomes more real and painful. Hence, though his actual experience in the life related was not many years in duration before that

unique life began to undergo a change with the advent of new conditions, yet those few years, together with tales told by prominent actors in the drama, lead the writer to hope that he may furnish some facts and sketch some characters of note and interest. He feels the more encouraged to take up the task, because amongst those who urged him to undertake it was one who, up to the time of his death, took the deepest interest in the country in whose earlier and later history he himself was so outstanding and forceful a figure. The reference is to the late Sir John Schultz, who took such an active part in the tumultuous troubles attending our entry into Confederation, and who, when escaping from Louis Riel and hard hunted by enemies, found asylum in my father's house at Kildonan. On New Year's eve of 1893, Sir John forwarded to the writer an excellent engraving of old Fort Garry, inscribed by his own hand (trembling with sickness) as follows: "For my esteemed friend of many years, Rev. R. G. MacBeth, of Augustine Church, from Lieutenant-Governor Schultz, Government House, Winnipeg, in grate-

ful memory of my brave old friend, the Hon. Robert MacBeth, and as a souvenir of stirring events in other days." Accompanying this was a letter in which the following sentences occur in reference to a lecture or paper on the subject of the early days: "I am entirely at one with the wish that you may undertake this work—no one more capable—and I only hope that I may be granted life and leave to preside at a meeting when you give the first-fruits of this most interesting subject. The people, the circumstances of their coming and their surroundings were altogether unique and should be recorded. There is too much of a desire nowadays to ignore the past and the services in it that men like the Selkirk settlers rendered; so by all means carry out your half-formed design." Besides this, some time ago the Rev. W. D. Ballantyne, Editor of the *Canada Presbyterian*, requested an article for the semi-jubilee number of his paper, and having received one (somewhat hurriedly written) wrote suggesting a series in the same line. After making the suggestion Mr. Ballantyne says, "It is very important, you

will agree with me, that those early days, and the men who lived in them, should not be forgotten; and you ought as far as possible, in justice to the brave men who toiled and bore so much and so nobly kept the faith, to help rescue their names from oblivion."

With this view then before him, and with the hope of writing some chapters on the inner life of the old settlers and a few character sketches that may be of interest, the writer essays the agreeable but perhaps too ambitious task which the necessities of the case, the requests of friends, and his own desire to be of service in preserving some record of a vanished life seem to lay before his hand.

After writing this chapter and outlining the others, it occurred to me that it would immeasurably increase the interest and value of the volume if a Preface could be secured from Sir Donald A. Smith, High Commissioner for Canada, who has been so long and honorably connected with the history of this country, and who, moreover, was a personal friend of my father, from whom I have had much of

the letter and the spirit of the book. I accordingly wrote to the worthy knight (who, it is needless to say, has not seen this paragraph), and take this opportunity of acknowledging the gracious and courtly kindness of his consent to write "a few words of preface." From one of Sir Donald's letters the following extract is made:

"Your father . . . was one of my most esteemed friends, and it is indeed well that his life-work and that of other Kildonan men, who so materially aided in the opening up of the great North-West, should be given to the public, and it is certainly appropriate this should be done by one so fully conversant with the whole subject as yourself."


CHAPTER II.

GENESIS OF THE SELKIRK COLONY.

WITH the main historical facts leading to the planting of a colony from the north of Scotland in the midst of the American continent, it is reasonable to assume that the most of our readers are fairly familiar, and it is not the purpose of these papers to go at length or in detail into such matters. But the drift of events may be noted in order that the actual situation of the colonists may be understood before we pass into the study of personal life and immediate surroundings in their new home. "The Governor and Company of Adventurers trading into Hudson's Bay," or, as they were better known, the Hudson's Bay Company, had from about the year 1670 practically controlled the whole of America west of the great lakes. We are in the habit

now of commiserating the French king who, adopting the sneer of Voltaire, spoke of the cession of Canada to England as the surrender of "a few hundred arpents of snow," but there have been a great many people besides Louis XV. who looked upon the territory which to-day furnishes the finest wheat in the world, exports the cattle from a thousand plains, and holds the richest mines yet discovered, as a region affording a sphere of operations only to the hunter and the trapper. But the Earl of Selkirk, who at the opening of this century practically controlled the Hudson's Bay Company, though he doubtless saw in this great region the field for an immensely profitable fur trade, seems to have had a more prescient understanding of its future possibilities. Moreover, all we have heard of the man from those who knew him leads us to believe that he was actuated by higher than selfish motives for himself or his company, when, at great personal cost, he brought to the banks of the Red River the company of his fellow-countrymen known to history as the "Selkirk settlers." It is true that at the time there was keen and

sometimes bloody rivalry between the Hudson's Bay and the North-West companies for the trade of the region, and that the Earl's move in bringing out the first group of colonists as a base of supply in food and as laborers for his company might have been looked on as highly prudent and strategic; but in regard to the main body of the settlers, evidence is not lacking to show that the Earl, whose name was held in sacred memory by them, and who spent and was spent in efforts to establish them in a new land, was greatly impelled to this by seeing these unhappy people turned out of their homes in Scotland that their holdings might be turned into sheep tracts. The question, "Is not a man better than a sheep?" is supposed to admit of but one answer amongst the generality of mankind, but the landlord of that day and place had a different view, and hence the man had to give way and make room for the more profitable sheep. Back there first of all began the sufferings and privations of these people. Doubtless their life had been strenuous and struggling enough under a system of landlordism which we have never



known on these free prairies; but up to that point it was the best they knew, and when the fiat went forth that they must vacate their homes and holdings, many a heart-rending scene can be imagined. I have often heard my father speak of the cruel evictions he witnessed as a boy, when whole families were turned out on the strath with their poor "gear" to witness the burning of their dearly beloved, if humble, cabin. To such a persecuted people Lord Selkirk came as a rescuing angel, and though, as we have said, he may have had some regard to the advantage of his company, and though some promises he made to the settlers he did not fulfil, owing to many entanglements in the conflicts for the fur trade, yet on the whole his treatment of the colonists and his efforts on their behalf were such that, when he returned with ruined health and shattered fortune to die in Scotland, in 1820, his loss was deeply mourned by the settlers, whose descendants have delighted in giving his name to points and places all over the West.

The work of bringing the colonists to the Red River by way of Hudson's Bay was not

the simple task it would be in this day of "ocean greyhounds," and even when they were landed on the shores of the bay it seemed as if their troubles were deepening darkly. Of the band of colonists that left Scotland in 1813, we are told in Begg's History, "that during the voyage fever broke out amongst the passengers, and when they arrived at their destination the party of Scotch emigrants were in a dreadful condition and utterly unfit to undertake the overland journey to Red River. Many of them died before and after landing, and the remainder were so worn out with sickness that they were obliged to remain at the bay for the whole of the following winter. From all accounts it would appear that these poor people were not properly cared for by the agents of Lord Selkirk, and that the food and shelter provided were totally inadequate for their comfort or protection during the severities of the weather. After spending a most miserable winter at Church Hill and York Factory, the survivors started in the summer of 1814 for Red River, arriving there early in the autumn. A few days after

their arrival they were put in possession of land, but there were neither implements to till the soil nor a sufficiency of food to be had. Added to this, the settlement was on the eve of a series of disturbances which shortly afterwards resulted in the destruction of the colony by the servants of the North-West Company." The protectorate exercised over the settlers by the Hudson's Bay Company naturally excited the enmity of their rivals, the North-West Company, against the unfortunate colonists. The following extract from a letter written by Mr. Alexander McDonnell, who was one of the leading spirits in the latter company at the time, will show the position of affairs.

Mr. McDonnell, writing to his brother-in-law, McGillivray, says: "Nothing but the complete downfall of the colony by fair means or foul will satisfy some—a most desirable object if it can be effected. So here is at them with all my heart and energy."

That the leading spirits of the North-West Company did go "at them with all their heart and energy" the immediate sequel proves, for

in the next year they broke the colony up and scattered the settlers to the four winds. Some of the persecuted people entered the service of the Hudson's Bay Company, some went out for the winter to Jack River on Lake Winnipeg, while a considerable number of families were deported by the North-West Company to eastern Canada, where their descendants are found to-day at many points. Almost coincident with this breaking up of the colony on the Red River, another party of emigrants (amongst whom was my father, then a lad of sixteen) left Scotland for this place, setting sail early in June, 1815, in pitiful (but to them, perhaps, blissful) ignorance of what had happened their predecessors and of what awaited themselves on their arrival.

CHAPTER III

SETTLING UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

AS we closed our last chapter we saw a body of colonists leaving the north of Scotland in the early summer of 1815 to join the colony on the far Red River. However strenuous and difficult their life may have been, and however much the struggle to gain a livelihood was accentuated by the oppressive landlordism of the time, it requires no vivid imagination to see how sadly they took leave of their beloved strath. No people in the world are more strongly attached to their native land than the Scotch, and as their vessel, outward bound, carried these emigrants beyond sight of the heath-clad hills, many a group such as the painter of "Lochaber no more" furnishes us, might be seen on its deck with wistful eyes gazing back toward the coast.

line of dear old Scotland. But as the days wore on in that long voyage their expectation would turn also to the new land to which they were going. Some of their kindred had gone before them as if to prepare the way, and those coming now looked forward to finding their friends in free and happy homes in the colony on a new continent. With these friends they might well hope to find a cheerful resting-place, renewing old memories, until they, too, could have homes of their own in the free land of the West.

But alas! how cruelly disappointing to them would the scene of ruined homes and desolate hearthstones be, and how deadly a blow would be given to all their hopes when they would find their friends scattered whither not even the few remaining could tell! It is impossible to let the mind dwell upon scenes like these, and then on the ultimate triumph of these people, without thinking of the splendid valor of the Scottish blood and of the supreme faith in God which carried them through to the end. As they landed on the bleak shores of Hudson's Bay, and after a weary journey stood amidst

the snow and ice of November on the spot where they had expected to find the homes of their friends, but where they found only a scene of desolation, the very north wind with freezing breath might seem to howl across the bleak plains the old question of infidelity, "Where is now thy God?" But these people had been from their childhood indoctrinated in a great creed whose central truth was the sovereignty of God, and in many a solitary place the wilderness heard from their hearts the old psalm of the fathers:

"Why art thou then cast down, my soul,
What should discourage thee?
And why with vexing thoughts art thou
Disquieted in me?
Still trust in God: for Him to praise
Good cause I yet shall have;
He of my countenance is the health,
My God who doth me save."

Lest it might be supposed that the sympathies of the present writer would lead him to picture too highly the struggles of the colonists, let us hear what Begg, a recent writer, in his "History

of the North-West," says at this point: "Instead of finding a thriving settlement they found only ruins; but, worse than all, there was no food to feed them, and they had to continue their journey, in company with those who had returned from Jack River, in cold and snow to Pembina, 70 miles farther. Here they set to work to erect rude huts to shelter themselves, but in a month or so they had to leave these temporary houses and journey to the plains in the hope of securing food, there being a scarcity of provisions at Pembina, and no means of procuring any near that place. These unfortunate people had to journey a distance of 150 miles, and as they were ill-provided with suitable clothes to protect their persons from the cold they suffered dreadfully. Meeting with a party of hunters they remained with them during the rest of the winter, performing such work as they were capable of doing, in return for which they were fed and sheltered till spring, when they returned to Pembina, and from thence descended the Red River to Fort Douglas. They then began to cultivate the soil, and

everything seemed propitious to their becoming comfortably settled in their new home, when, on the 19th of June, 1816, an event happened which once more brought desolation to the colony." That event was a collision between armed forces of the Hudson's Bay and North-West companies at Seven Oaks, in Kildonan. The actual collision was partly the result of an accident, but it ended in the killing of Governor Semple, of the former company, and the killing or wounding of twenty-one out of twenty-seven men who accompanied him. This gave the North-West Company for a time the upper hand, and the colonists had to abandon their homes once more, and go out to Jack River, where they suffered great hardships during the winter. Next spring, however, the tables were turned, and the Hudson's Bay Company got control, Lord Selkirk, on his way back from Montreal with his hired De Meuron soldiers, capturing Fort William and afterwards Fort Douglas from his rivals. Things had become so bad between these companies that the Imperial Government interfered by commissioners,

and the settlers once more returned to their holdings. Law-suits innumerable ensued between the two companies until after the death of Lord Selkirk (who had always steadfastly opposed union), when a coalition was formed, the Hudson's Bay Company ultimately absorbing the others and continuing unto this day. During all this fighting between the rival companies the colonists endured constant hardships, and experienced one set-back after another. The historian before quoted tells us that "in the winter of 1817 they were forced to go again to Pembina owing to scarcity of food, but on their return to the settlement in the spring managed to sow a considerable area of land with wheat, etc. The summer was favorable, and the fields soon assumed a promising appearance, but on the 18th of July, 1818, the sky suddenly became darkened by clouds of grasshoppers, and as they descended on the earth in dense swarms they destroyed every green thing before them. The settlers managed to save a little grain, but not a vegetable was left in the gardens." It seemed as if everything was going

against them, and once more they went for refuge to Pembina during the winter. In the spring of 1819 they returned and sowed again, but the young grasshoppers in swarms began to appear, and devoured everything on the fields and plains. Again they were forced to go to Pembina, and so continued the struggle, subsisting on the products of the chase, until three years afterwards, when they gained sufficient from their fields to keep them from fear of starvation. This was in 1822, or about ten years after the first of them had arrived in the country. Things went fairly well to the year 1826, when a winter of great severity and unusual depth of snow led to great distress in the country. The plain hunters, who depended nearly altogether on the buffalo for food supply, were the chief sufferers, for the storms drove the buffalo beyond reach and killed the horses of the hunters. The settlers did all they could to relieve their brethren on the plains, but in the spring they themselves suffered the severest loss in their history. The sudden thaw of the great snow and ice accumulation caused the

Red River to overflow its banks and become a raging torrent of wide extent. The settlers barely escaped with their lives and some of their stock, but their houses and stables were swept away in total wreckage into Lake Winnipeg. Yet, when the flood went down, these undaunted men came back and began all over again; and though we have had floods and grasshoppers, and civil disturbances, since that time the colony was never again uprooted. When we read over this hurried history of disastrous years, we feel that the most sympathetic and vivid imagination cannot conceive the sufferings these settlers endured, and we know that those who passed through the experience found no language adequate to the task of describing it. In my father's closing years he was often visited by tourists from the Old Country, seeking information as to the early days, and I recall the attempts he made to depict the scenes, concerning which he could say, with the hero of Virgil, "*Quorum magna pars fui.*" I can see him yet, a strongly-built, massive figure, in the old wooden chair, on the arm of which he brought

down his hand now and again to give Celtic emphasis to his words. I can hear the story flow on till he felt the inadequacy of language as recollections rushed upon him, and then he would stop short, saying, "It's no use talking, gentlemen, I can't tell you half of it; but I will say one thing, and that is that no people in the world but the Scotch could have done it," and the last party of Englishmen that came to the old farm-house, seeing his earnestness, applauded him with unselfish enthusiasm. Whether my father was unduly partial to his own race or not may be a matter of opinion, but there can be no two opinions as to the difficulties these colonists triumphantly battled with, and if you seek their monument, look around you on the religious and educational as well as the material greatness of the North-West.

CHAPTER IV.

SETTLED AND AT WORK.

THE great flood of 1826 passed over, and the colonists at once returned to their farms on the Red River, and settled down to the regular routine of work. The real purpose of these papers can now be fairly entered upon, for it was only after this flood that the settlers were able to cease from the running fight for life and take up in some steady way the business of colonizing and the purpose of living. To write on the life they were to lead till the advent of new conditions changed it, to write on this life as seen from the inner side, is to make an effort at reproducing on paper scenes long since vanished, and no more to be reproduced in actuality on the globe. There is no spot left upon our continent, at least, where, for well-nigh half a

century, a colony could remain practically untouched by the rest of the world, unvexed by its artificial troubles, and unspoiled by its mad racing after material greatness. Speaking to his class one day as to the way in which men find that some one has preceded them everywhere, a keenly humorous professor, for illustration, said that, "thanks to the enterprise of the modern advertiser, the legends of the patent medicine man now haunted us in the deepest solitudes of nature;" and that is but one way of saying that in our time we cannot, if we would, isolate ourselves from a telephoning, telegraphing, railway and steamship travelling humanity. It was far otherwise in the days of the Selkirk Colony, for I have often heard my father (who left Scotland, as we have said, in the opening of June, 1815) say that they never heard of the battle of Waterloo until late in the following autumn. Think of the solitariness such a statement implied, for while the cannonade of "that loud Sabbath" might have almost made itself felt through vibrant air across the globe, a considerable number of British subjects remained

for months uncertain as to how the long struggle on the battle-ground of Europe had eventuated, and unaware of the fact that Napoleon, the troubler of the world's peace, was immured on a lonely rock safely guarded by the restless sea. From that date onward for nearly fifty long years that little band of Highlanders remained shut out from the rest of the world, till through freer communication with "the States" to the south, and "Canada" to the east, the tide of a larger life rolled up against us, and prepared the way for our entry, "not without tumult," into Confederation. It shall be our effort in the few chapters that follow to give those interested an idea of what these hermit settlers were doing in the meantime.

They chose to settle along the banks of the Red River on narrow farms (the general width being ten chains frontage on the river), running back at right angles from it on the prairie. These farms extended back two miles, as a freehold; with an additional two miles as a "hay privilege." Ultimately, these "outer two miles" were given in fee simple to the owner of the

frontage, except in cases where others by actual occupation had secured possession of them in part, in which case the frontage owner got an equivalent elsewhere. These ten-chain lots, owned by the head of the family, were frequently subdivided among the sons, so that when Ontario people, accustomed to square farms, began to come amongst us, they were greatly amused at our "farming on lanes," and pointed out the disadvantage of having to go to work on the cultivated plots ("parks," we called them) at the outlying ends of these river strips. But there was "much method in the madness" of long narrow farms, or, to be plainer, there were many good reasons to justify that plan of settlement. To begin with, the settlers built along the river banks for convenience in obtaining water, which, at that date, before there were any cities along its banks, was more drinkable than it is now. Outside the swamps and sloughs the river was practically the only reliable source of steady water supply. Wells were little known, suction pumps were unheard of, and I remember that a "chain-and-wheel"

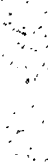
pump, which my father imported from "the States," was one of the seven wonders even in my time. Then, again, settlement by the river had food as well as water supply in view, for, unvexed by the present-day hindrances to fish-culture in rivers, large numbers of fish; from the "gold-eye" to the sturgeon, offered a provision by no means to be despised. As to the narrowness of the farms, it can readily be seen that the colonists settled close together for mutual defence in troublous times, and for the advantages of social life, as well as for church and school facilities; and if the sons, settling on subdivisions, seemed lacking in ambition, it must be remembered that to go outside the settlement in the early days was to exile oneself absolutely beyond the pale of these advantages.

From the beginning of settlement, farming was the principal occupation of the colonists. Buffalo-hunting, fishing, etc., were incidents in the life of somewhat rare occurrence thereafter. Some of the younger men did follow the buffalo, but for the most part the delicacies of buffalo meat, moose nose, beaver tail, etc., were obtained

by trading with the half-breeds and Indians, who had no taste for agriculture but had an unquenchable love for the plains and rivers. The facilities for farming, as may be supposed, were not of the best. The implements (spade and hoe for planting and sowing) were almost as primitive as those which might have been used by the "grand old gardener," but with these by dint of great toil the settlers soon managed to make a livelihood. The reaping was done with the sickle and the cradle. Then the age of machinery came in, and the hoe gave place to the old wooden plough, whose oaken mould-board was pointed with such an iron attachment as Tubal Cain might have made "in the days when earth was young." The sickle and cradle gave way to the first cumbrous reaper, which had to be put in and out of gear by lifting the machine with a fence rail and moving the big wheel into or out of contact with the smaller cogged one. Behind the platform of this reaper a stand was placed for the able-bodied man who "forked off" the grain in sheaves as it fell, and to do this with

regularity and neatness in heavy crops tested even the brawniest Highlander of them all.

The same cumbrous machine was used for a time in hay-cutting, and it is said in the case of the first one imported, lest the evident design of the maker should be interfered with, and lest any dislocation of the parts might be attended with serious results, the platform was retained and the hay "forked off" in the same manner as wheat. However, the cutting of the wheat was only the beginning of a series of difficult processes through which finally bread was reached. The threshing was carried on at first with flails, with the use of great "fans" and winnowing riddles to separate the wheat from the chaff, a process which enables us to understand the scriptural figures of the fan and the threshing-floor. Shortly after this era of flails the two-horse tread-mill was introduced, by means of which threshing became a comparatively easy and uneventful process, the only occasional excitement being caused when one of the horses, growing wearied with the monotony, would vary proceedings by



breaking his halter-line and turning a somersault on the fanning mill, or when the band would fly off the drive-wheel, and the horses would be forced to run until the ever-useful and ever-ready fence rail introduced below the treads brought matters to a standstill. To get the wheat into flour was the next difficulty. First of all the "quern" was used, two flat stones (the upper and the nether)—the upper having a handle which turned it upon the wheat and brought the grain into some semblance of flour, not over white, but in the best degree a health-producing and dyspepsia-obliterating substance. We do not know how far oriental customs prevailed, but it was in view of such a scene as might be witnessed at these "querns" that our Lord spoke of identity of occupation and diversity of character in the words, "Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken and the other left."

In time the Hudson's Bay Company sent out an expert, and built a windmill at Point Douglass, in working at which Hugh Polson, one of the settlers, took such careful observation of the

process that he afterwards built one for himself and several others at different points in the settlement. These mills did fair work, but when a long calm prevailed there was always danger of a flour famine, unless by borrowing from one another the supply could be eked out until the wind arose. Next in order came water-mills, of which we remember Inkster's, Matheson's and Tait's. Hydraulic engineering was not in a very advanced stage; there was generally trouble with the dam, and except during freshets that were strong enough to drive the wheel, the mill-ponds fell into the somewhat ignominious use of vessels in which to wash the sheep before shearing. But the era of steam was at hand, and if the early settlers grew strong on brown bread with a marked tendency to blackness, their descendants were to have the doubtful advantages of the maximum of whiteness with the minimum of nourishment from wheat whose life is crushed out by modern methods and the exactions of the "five o'clock tea."

CHAPTER V.

HORSE-RAISING AND HAY-MAKING.

WESTERN politicians are proverbially fruitful of phrases, but one of them outdid all the rest when he introduced in the Speech from the Throne here a year ago the phrase "diversified agriculture." In the language of the common people, the phrase was intended to mean "mixed farming" and was used to describe farming in which not only the tilling of the soil but the raising of stock finds a place. Viewed in that light the farming of the old settlers was "diversified agriculture," and in that, as in many other respects, the principle on which they worked is a valuable one to people who desire to make a good living on western prairies. In the days before the incoming of machinery the colonists raised horses principally to supply the

buffalo hunters, and also to serve their own amusement and love of simple sport. Splendid horses they were, as I remember them, imported from England and acclimatized in process of further breeding, swift of foot, strong of muscle, deep-chested and mettlesome. The prices realized for buffalo runners in the early days were not so large as might be expected, and I often heard that, when my father sold a famous running horse for the sum of £14, it was said of him by some that "he sold his conscience" when he asked such an extravagant amount. It was customary when the plain hunters came in and encamped on the prairies around Fort Garry, for the settlers to take up such horses as they had to sell. These were tested with the racers of the camp, and if the results were satisfactory a sale readily followed. A brother of mine once took up a horse of a strain noted for fleetness to the camp of an old hunter named Acapot, and though horse and rider were without special training he easily outran the horse put up by the hunters. A sale for £30 immediately followed, my brother

scarce realizing how good a horse he had. After the sale, however, the old hunter told my brother that his horse had outrun the most famous runner in the camp, and though shortly afterwards Acapot retired to live near Prince Albert, no amount of money ever tempted him to part with the horse he had purchased on such easy (though to us extravagant) terms.

The "Queen's Birthday" was the great holiday of the year (no people were more loyal), and as soon as we could ride each of us had a horse (often without a saddle) to go up to the fort and witness the contests of speed between the best horses of the settlers and the plain hunters. The present day gambling of the race-course was practically unknown, and for the most part the races were honestly run with utilitarian ends in view for the speediest animal. Besides horses the settlers had cattle and sheep on the farm. Oxen were largely used in the operations of the farm down to a recent date, and for purposes of hay and wood hauling were "hitched" single in the Red River cart or sled, both of which in their primitive state were made entirely

of wood. Sheep were useful in the extreme as affording clothing in "hodden grey." The processes from sheep-shearing to the home-made suit were slow and primitive in the light of modern machinery, but the article was good, as we know from personal experience.

The other day the writer got word of what remained of his grandfather's sword in the old house of one of the settlers who died some years ago. This settler (Angus Polson by name) was a famous worker in wood, and amongst other things was the chief maker of spinning wheels in the colony. The broken fragment of the sword-hilt that remains tells an eloquent and pathetic story. Doubtless the old soldier (who was one of the survivors of the Black Hole of Calcutta, and who died at Kildonan, aged 107) prized greatly the sword he had carried on the hot plains of India, but to help his fellow-colonists he gave it to the maker of spinning wheels that the brass basket-hilt might be broken and used in their construction. The old weaver's loom, too, was a familiar figure, and the sight of the weaver throwing the flying shuttle with its

crossing threads has always enlarged before me, as the years have grown, into the vision of Him who sits at the "roaring loom of time" and weaves with warp and woof the web of human life. Since then I have always understood more clearly and entered more fully into the words of the great hymn:

" With mercy and with judgment
My web of time He wove,
And aye the dews of sorrow
Were lusted with his love,
I'll bless the hand that guided,
I'll bless the heart that planned,
When throned where glory dwelleth
In Immanuel's land."

After the weaving of the cloth came the "fulling," done in primitive but vigorous style by the kicking of it by barefooted boys, who found it one of the amusements of the winter evenings; though it is a tribute to the hardiness of Highland blood to say that after this heated exercise the moccasin was put on and the way home in the snow and bitter night was taken scathless. Speaking of winter-night occupation for the

boys, I may say that another one was "knocking barley," as we called it, preparatory to its use in soup-making. A large block hewn from the tree was hollowed out in a somewhat circular form. This was partly filled with barley, which we took turns in pounding with a long-headed wooden mallet, while some one more daring than the rest kept turning the grain with a stick or long-handled spoon, to the imminent and constant risk of his fingers. When the grain was thus well hulled, it was winnowed and ready for soup, compared with which some of the spiced transparencies which now pass by the name would be tame and insipid.

In the summer time the farm stock of which we have spoken ran wild on the prairies, horses especially being out of sight for months at a time; and we recall as a great constitution-builder days spent in the saddle in search of the wandering bands. In the long winter, of course, they must be housed and fed, hence "making hay while the sun shone" in summer was a great reality to us all. Hay-cutting began on the 20th (afterwards 25th) July, and the scene

of operations was the wild prairie. The outer two miles of each river frontage belonged, for hay purposes, to the frontage owner up to a certain date, but for the most part cutting was done on prairie that was free as air to everybody. The best hay meadows were located in good time before the above date, and on the night before people were camped all around them. Each one knew pretty well just the spot he was going to strike next morning, and if more than one had their eyes on the same spot, it became the property of the one who reached there first and made a "circle" by cutting around the field he wished to claim. There was sometimes (in dry years when hay was scarce) great rivalry, and we have seen camps all ready to start on the stroke of midnight, and actually starting to mark out circles in a thunderstorm. We have seen a circle entered by another than the one who made it, but it was in the case of someone who had tried to circle the whole prairie for himself, and in such case the unwritten law of the camp said that it served him right. There was rarely any trouble to speak

of, and we look back to the camp on the prairie with its many tents like a white village as a most delightful and health-giving experience. Practical jokes were common enough, it is true. We have known some of the boys to stampede a band of horses through the camp, to the alarm and even the possible danger of peaceful sleepers in the tents. In the matter of selecting a piece of hay-ground we have known a man who located a choice spot the night before, come into camp and turn his cart with the shafts pointing in the direction to which he was to go next morning, but some wag, suspecting the reason, got up under cover of the darkness and turned the cart so as to point exactly in the opposite way. In that case, though the joke was enjoyed by the camp, the party on whom it was played was not allowed to suffer. Mutual helpfulness was constant, and when prairie fires swept the plain and consumed the stacks of a settler, all the rest helped him out. I remember well when this happened once in the case of an uncle of mine, how the neighbors all joined together and put a hundred cart-loads into his


farmyard next day. The rides home on Saturday evening after the week's absence were amongst the most exciting and pleasing experiences of hay-making time. Sometimes twenty or thirty horsemen were together, mostly on young horses, and races here and there were much in fashion. As we have observed, saddles were not plentiful, but they were improvised for the occasion. Flat bundles of hay, with cord-line stirrups, were considered good, though we have known a case in which a feint to apply a match necessitated the speedy removal of such a saddle—a task, however, not difficult, as no girth was used.

In the winter the stock, well housed, were fed from the hay-stacks, out of which the hay was pulled with a wooden hook. When the hand "hay-knife" was introduced from the States, it was an exceedingly popular instrument, and the few that could be had made the round of the neighborhood, till it could not well be known to whom they belonged. It was alluding to this perhaps that my uncle (from whom we had borrowed his) one day coming over the snow-

drifts into our hay-yard, said facetiously to my brother, "Boy Sandy, would you mind letting me have the loan of my hay-knife?" But Sandy was not to be outdone, and completely floored my uncle by coolly replying, "All right, uncle, but be sure to bring it back as soon as you are done with it."

CHAPTER VI.

SOCIAL LIFE.




THE winters on the Red River are undeniably long, though as land cultivation has extended (so some state as the reason) they are less severe than formerly. But when people can point to the magnificence of the root and cereal crops as resultant in some measure from the depth to which the ground freezes in the winter time, they are not disposed to quarrel with the course of nature. In the early days the problem of how to while away the long winter, when little work beyond the feeding of stock had to be done, was much in evidence, but generally found solution. The nearness of the houses to one another was conducive to much freedom in the interchange of social visits, and stands out in marked contrast to the isolation of people on

square farms in the thinly populated districts. "The latch-string was always on the outside," and as for locks they were practically as much unknown as in Acadia, "home of the happy," of whose people it is said :

"Neither locks had they to their doors, nor bars to their windows ;

But their dwellings were open as day and the hearts of the owners."

Hospitality was unbounded, and as no caste or color lines were drawn, not only was the white friend made welcome, but the belated Indian, still far from his wigwam, was sure of a good supper and the warm corner by the chimney as a couch for his innocent sleep. Such things as calling cards were unheard of, and except in the evening time even knocking at the door was dispensed with by near neighbors. The older people delighted principally in long talks together, oftentimes doubtless of the dangers they had passed. Legends of their ancestors far and near, with the struggles of their Fatherland for civil and religious freedom, were recounted proudly and thankfully, and as I, the youngest



child of the family, was generally in the "old folks" group when these tales were told, there was "poured into my veins a Scottish prejudice which shall never cease to boil along there till the flood-gates of life shut in eternal rest." I suppose Eutychus found Paul's sermon too long because he took no interest in the subject, but it was a farewell sermon, and the last words between people of kindred heart never seem to be enough. Hence it was that these old people never seemed in a hurry to part, and that the way in which they lingered in saying good-night sometimes amused the younger folks who could not enter into their feelings. It is but little more than ten years gone by since my father bowed his grey head to meet the coming of the Lord, and on the day of his funeral one of the few survivors of that early band stood with me beside the coffin and looked upon that worn face marked amidst its massive strength with the deep lines of suffering and toil. And as he stood there, that aged man (Donald Murray by name), with tears streaming down his own deeply furrowed cheeks, said, indicating the body of

my father, "It's seventy years since Robert and I have been friends together." Threescore years and ten! What a retrospect! and across what a rugged plain of hard experience! I knew then in the light of that statement how those long talks and slow leave-takings were to wear in my memory henceforth a halo of sacredness, as I would see those two, who had clung together during the long years and fought their trials with the splendid valor of their race and a noble faith in God, standing where the ways parted down near the sunset of life. Amidst such scenes as these the old survivors of the colony waited for the end undisturbed by the newer conditions beginning to obtain around them.

The younger people had in the winter time their social gatherings and their literary and other meetings. The question of dancing is much discussed in the abstract, and we are not going to enter upon a discussion here, but the dancing of those days in a simple and pure state of society was practically as much an outlet for the physical exuberance as were the games of

ball, etc., in the summer, and no more harmful morally so far as we know. Round dances had not come in, and the reels, strathspeys, etc., were a test of physical endurance as well as of skill. A special dance known as the "Red River jig" we have never seen any one but a native of the country do to perfection. The music was always the violin played to the vigorous accompaniment of the foot, and we have known men carry with them an extra pair of moccasins, so that when one pair was worn out on the rough floor they might not be at a loss. New Year's Day calling was much in vogue, and without any impartiality every house in the settlement was visited. It was a great day for the Indians, who in bands, firing off their shot-guns occasionally, went from house to house, and were feasted to a dangerous degree. The New Year's dinner was a feature in every house, and the skilled makers of plum-pudding displayed their talent without stint. In the evening many social parties were held as a close to a busy day.

The "oft-told tale" was doubtless repeated in effective ways, for "marrying and giving in

marriage" became the order of many a day. All efforts at "surprise weddings" were rendered futile by the necessity of publishing the banns in church, and the parties had all the celebrity that this public disclosure of their plans could give them. Invitations were given verbally from house to house, generally by the bride's father. Marriages were as a rule celebrated in the church, and all the guests drove there often to the accompaniment of shot-gun salutes of honor by the way. This drive to and fro was *par excellence* the time for displaying fast horses, whose decking in gay ribbons called "wedding favors," took up more attention than the adornment of the person. The speediest horses were secured for such occasions. We have known men go long distances to secure some noted horse, and consternation reigned when it leaked out that some one had secured so and so's "Charlie" or "Tom" for the wedding. On the way home speeding could be indulged in to any extent, with one well-defined limitation, namely, that no one was to pass the bridal party on pain of social ostracism. On the Sabbath succeeding

the wedding the "kirking" took place, the bridal party and "best young people" in all their wedding bravery of millinery driving together with their gaily decked horses to church and there occupying a special pew. When the groom brought his bride to his ancestral mansion, a "home wedding" was given with practically the same amount of social function as had attended the ceremony of the marriage. As a general thing the dowry was not large when the people were poor, but in addition to the outfitting such as the custom required a few choice cows were driven over to the bridegroom's farm as a nucleus for future wealth in flocks and herds.

CHAPTER VII.

SOME PECULIAR LOCAL CUSTOMS.

THERE are some phases of experience that can be looked at under the heading of the social life, though they might possibly be considered with equal appropriateness in connection with the religious services of the time, and such may be the case with the matters touched upon in this chapter. The wide-reaching import of the sacrament of Baptism we sometimes think is not sufficiently understood in some quarters in our time, and this may be due somewhat to the lack of solemnity noticeable in its celebration. In the early days the settlers on the Red River, in their social life and their service of worship, made much of it. Parents, except in cases of sickness, always presented their children for baptism in the church at the regular forenoon

service. Of course, there was a certain amount of preparation beforehand that partook somewhat of the frivolities of this world. The "christening robe" (the word survived from a former ecclesiastic connection) was a matter of much concern, and any specially good one, hand-embroidered, etc., was passed around from one family to another in the succeeding generations. It was well understood that the sacrament meant much more than the giving of a name to the child; nevertheless the name was not by any means without great importance. The practice of naming the child "after" some one was much in vogue, and led sometimes to dilemmas and difficulties. For instance, when two or more near relatives on either side were to be considered, the parents were in serious straits lest they should give offence to the one or the other. The difficulty had to be faced, and the danger braved, or else the child had to be encumbered with a string of names such as only foreign princes can boast, and we have even known an irate friend or relative mollified by the promise, that on a similar occasion in the future he or

she should not be overlooked. Another of the difficulties resulting from the now (fortunately) almost obsolete custom of "naming" was not only the duplicating but the quadruplicating of names in the one neighborhood. The people got over that part of the trouble by introducing the use of "nick-names," derived either from personal characteristics or by prefixing or affixing some ancestral family name. This was well enough for the people themselves who knew locally "Black Sandy" and "Red Sandy," but since people at a distance did not know these fine shades of distinction, the primitive post-office or the mail-carrier confronted "confusion worse confounded" when a letter came addressed to a name owned by half a dozen different people in the parish. The difficulty was generally solved by some one of the name opening it, and if it was not for him he passed it on till the right party was reached. A "christening feast" often followed the "bapteezment of the bairn" (on a week-day of course), and to this the numerous relatives and friends were asked.

If we pass over now to the sadder side of life,

we shall find there also many customs peculiar to those early times. Death then, as now, claimed its victims (once or twice in great numbers, when in the dry years or the locust days epidemics swept the colony), and many practices strange to later years gathered around the dying and the dead. To begin with, there was, without doubt, amongst the people of that time, a certain dread of the supernatural, which gave rise to what was well-nigh, in some cases, superstition. Certain signs and portents as to the approach of death were not without direst significance to many; and the same state of mind and feeling likely led to the custom of holding wakes being persevered in down to a recent date. There may have been extravagances in these directions, but does not a vivid sense of the supernatural imply, where the Bible is held, a corresponding depth in religious life? And is not the effort to eliminate the supernatural, so noticeable in our day, and to substitute for it the blind working of impersonal force, accountable for much of the irreverence and even the scepticism prevalent amongst us? Only let men feel,

like the Philippian jailer, that the Power whose hand is shaking the foundations is the immanent God, and the question, "What must we do to be saved?" will come up from hearts that, awakened to a sense of sin, will not rest till they find the Cross, and will follow the light and leading of Christ into valorous deeds for God and for humanity. If there was a suspicion of superstition in the religion of those early people, it was begotten of a profound reverence for the Almighty and a deep sense of the mysteries of infinite things. Like the Puritan and the Covenanter, they were always listening for the voice of God, and feared it with a noble dread that made them fearless of anything finite and earth-born.

When the last rites over the dead were to be observed, invitations to the funeral were given personally from house to house by some near relative of the person deceased, and often people felt much hurt if they did not receive a direct invitation, without which they did not always feel themselves at liberty to attend. On the day of the funeral refreshments were served in

the shape of bread, cake, cheese, and often liquors. It was the custom of the time, and even though in general there was not much consumed, the absence of refreshments in the case of people of means would have been severely commented on, not only as a breach of hospitality, but even as a mark of indifference to the event and to the memory of the departed. We have known of people giving directions as to the conduct of their own funerals in other ways, but not in regard to refreshments, except in one case. An old man, a retired Hudson's Bay Company officer, on his death-bed sent for my father to entrust to him the management of his funeral in this regard, and fearing lest the reputation for lavish hospitality for which he had been noted would suffer through the parsimony of relatives, gave explicit instructions as to the quantity of each article of food and drink to be procured from the Hudson's Bay store at the cost of the estate, and even urged my father to exactness in seeing these orders carried out, with suggestions of post-mortem visitation in case of default.

The funeral service at the house was generally of considerable length. Several psalms were sung in long and mournful cadence, very impressive in its way; passages of Scripture for the comfort of the bereaved and the admonition of all were read and expounded, besides a sermon or address. One thing especially noticeable in these services was the absence of undeserved eulogy, and while, in regard to any who had been careless of religious things, no limitations were ever put, expressly or by implication, on the pardoning grace of God, no countenance was given to the idea of salvation for the persistently impenitent. The religion this implies may have been of a stern type, but it was the religion of people who felt that God could not belie His attributes, and must be just as well as loving.

Hearses were unknown in those days, and any proposal to put the coffin into any conveyance to be taken to the churchyard would have been looked upon as a mark of disrespect to the memory of the departed. Hence the coffin, shrouded, was invariably borne on a bier by

four men, who were relieved by other four every few minutes. The order of procession was as follows: The minister, accompanied by one of the elders, led the way; then the bearers with the coffin, followed by the chief mourners, after whom came all who attended, marching in twos. Four were always walking beside the bearers, and at the word "Relief," spoken at intervals by the elder in front, they took the places of the bearers, who dropped out and fell into the rear. Except in cases where the distance to the graveyard was great, none had to carry more than once or twice. In order to show how much these early settlers were opposed to having the dead borne to burial in any other way than that described, it is remembered that on the death of Donald Ross, a Hudson's Bay factor, they refused to allow the question of distance to interfere with their paying this tribute of respect to his memory, and so carried his body over eighteen miles, from Little Britain to St. John's. At the slow pace they would travel, this took a whole long day, and at noon they halted where a cart with provisions met

them. Here they had dinner, and again took up the line of march. There may be a medium in such things, but as a solemn and respectful tribute to the memory of the dead, such a funeral stands out strongly marked by comparison with the confused hurry of people who seem to have no time even to bury the dead with decency.

CHAPTER VIII.


CIVIL AND COMMERCIAL LIFE.

To write a chapter on the civil and commercial life of the old settlers would be easy if it could be made purely anecdotal; but if we are to make it more historical, the task is not so simple. For it must be remembered that the science and art of statecraft had made but little progress on the banks of the Red River, and that laws and the administration of them were primitive enough in those early days. So far as civil government was concerned, as soon as they had secured dominance over all rivals, the Hudson's Bay Company was the local representative and embodiment of British law in the colony. The local governor of that company, assisted by a council of representative men from the English and French speaking residents (the full title of

the conclave being "The Council of Assiniboia"), enacted such laws as the circumstances demanded, and cases left unprovided for in these local enactments were covered by the common law as embodied in British jurisprudence. The criminal law, of course, was that of England, and in all respects as soon as sufficient machinery was available, the practice and procedure would be that of the courts in the old land. Most of the real property laws were of local enactment to suit the peculiar circumstances. A great deal of the legislation reads strangely enough now, as it was specially applicable to the surroundings of the time. For instance, when horses by the hundred were feeding on the prairie, it was quite a common thing for any one to catch one and ride him or drive him till he found his own, or till he reached his destination, if not too far away. At first, on the principle of mutual helpfulness, this practice was little resented by the owner unless the horse was abused; but when the practice became too general, and as some not of the colonist class began to have altogether too

loose an idea about *meum* and *tuum* in the horse line, stringent laws were enacted. For a time it was a settled decision of the courts that the owner of a horse, finding him in the hands of another, could not only have such a one proceeded against, but could seize and hold the saddle or harness, etc., that was upon the horse at the time. The administration of law, when once a real system of administration was established, rested with a judge or recorder, assisted frequently by associated magistrates, and sometimes these magistrates (appointed from amongst the settlers) held court themselves. Serious offences were not frequent, and those that did come before the magistrates were disposed of in a summary way. In the quarrels that sometimes broke out I have seen my father, who was one of the magistrates, holding court in the house, and when he concluded that the parties were about equally to blame, he compelled them to advance from the sides of the room to the centre and shake hands in the presence of the court, as a declaration of their intention to live peaceably

from that time forward. I suppose that any breach of the peace afterwards would have been looked on as contempt of court and punished accordingly; hence the people who had a high veneration for authority generally kept the compact. In cases where threats had been made one against the other, the general practice was to cause the offender "to bind himself over to keep the peace," on the severest pains and penalties if he broke it. I remember the case of a merchant in whose employ, while on a freighting trip to St. Cloud, a young half-breed died of fever. The father of the lad held that the merchant was responsible for the death, and after partaking freely of stimulant visited the merchant's store with a hay-fork, determined to put the slayer of his son to death. The merchant felt decidedly uncomfortable at being hunted around the country by a half-drunken man with a weapon of that kind, and escaping through the back door fled to my father's house and invoked the protection of law against the man-slayer. Not long afterwards the half-breed arrived on horseback with his hay-fork. He was



given a bed in the kitchen, while the merchant passed a perhaps somewhat anxious night in another part of the house ; but in the morning, when the half-breed was sober, court was held, and after being shown how groundless his view was, he was bound over to keep the peace under severe penalties, and that settled it. Nowadays, or then, if enforced strictly, the criminal law would not deal so gently with a man who was disposed to prowl after innocent parties with murderous intent and a fork ; but a wholesome dread of the court, if any breach of the law were committed, made the plan effective. Cases did sometimes occur in which the officers of the law found themselves comparatively helpless against crowds, but these were of rare occurrence and were mostly the result of some combination for popular rights ; as, for instance, where it was demanded that trade be free to all, instead of being monopolized by companies.

When we turn to the commercial life of the settlers an equally primitive state of things meets us. For many years, of course, the Hudson's Bay Company controlled the trade

of the region, they alone having the right to traffic in furs, skins, etc., and they also supplying the settlers with such articles as they needed, in return for such produce as they could raise. So far as their treatment of the settlers in this regard is concerned—and we may say in all other ways—nothing could have been fairer or more liberal. Instead of taking a great quantity of produce from one, and none from another, the company apportioned out what they needed amongst the settlers, and thus gave all a fighting chance for life. The prices paid for produce were good, as high as eight shillings a bushel being sometimes paid for wheat. In regard to the fur and other trade all efforts to preserve a monopoly proved unavailing, and after several hard-fought legal cases, and after several popular demonstrations against monopoly, the principle of trade free to all was generally admitted and acted upon. Importations of goods were made chiefly from England *via* the Hudson's Bay, thence by water to the colony, and from the United States by means of cart trains. Goods from England were landed

at York Factory, and were brought thence by row-boats, manned by from eight to fourteen men, who sat on benches and pulled with great long oars, more like beams than modern sculls. No one who knew anything about the extreme toil of that weary life can fail in seeing the marvellous beauty of Whittier's "Red River Voyageur," and feeling how true it is to real life. We can see the bent form, the bronzed face and calloused hand of the boatman as we read the lines:

"Drearly blows the north-wind
From the land of ice and snow ;
The eyes that look are weary,
And heavy the hands that row."

We can see the tired face light up as he hears the sound of the bell from the cathedral opposite the fort to which he is coming:

"The voyageur smiles as he listens
To the sound that grows apace,
Well he knows the vesper ringing
Of the bells of St. Boniface.

“ The bells of the Roman mission,
That call from their turrets twain
To the boatman on the river,
To the hunter on the plain. ”

And we can all, amidst the tug and strain of
life, join in the noble allegory at the close :

“ Even so in our mortal journey
The bitter north winds blow,
And thus upon life's Red River
Our hearts as oarsmen row,
“ And when the Angel of Shadow
Rests his feet on wave and shore,
And our eyes grow dim with watching,
And our hearts faint at the oar,

“ Happy is he who heareth
The signal of his release,
In the bells of the Holy City,
The chimes of eternal peace. ”

Not all the voyageurs could have understood the lofty strain of the poet, though they all knew the toil of the life and the joy of arriving home. Burly and able-bodied fellows were these oarsmen of the half-blood, capable of enduring

almost any amount of labor and fatigue. Light-hearted and playful as kittens were they also, and at night, despite the labors of the day, they often indulged in their wild dances by the weird camp-fires along the shore to the music of the ever-ready violin. Before they started for York, and after they came back, these boatmen had special festivities. My father had a considerable number of boats on the line, and amongst the scenes of childhood photographed on my mind I can see the huge camp-fires on the river bank, and I can hear the wild shouts of these semi-savage men as they celebrated their outgoing or their incoming.

The other outlet for the development of commercial enterprise amongst these early settlers was trade with the United States to the south. Either to bring goods for themselves or for the Hudson's Bay Company, or other merchants, the settlers went every summer with trains of oxen and carts to St. Paul or St. Cloud, Minnesota, and at so much a hundred-weight freighted the merchandise thence to Fort Garry. It was a long and toilsome trip, and at times when the

warlike Sioux, red-handed from Minnesota massacres, were hanging on their trail, it was a dangerous one as well. At such times only the fact of their being well armed and strong in numbers, prevented the extinction of the freighters at the hands of the Indians. Commerce of the kind described called for more physical endurance and skill in crossing swamps and rivers than for the keen, aggressive education now required, and hence many who had but little learning in letters came to considerable wealth and prominence as freighters. Many of the half-blood were amongst the latter, and out of their prominence as freighters, together with their dearth of education, some amusing incidents took place. On one occasion a number of these freighters were staying (as the wealthier of them did) at a first-class hotel in St. Paul, and of course availed themselves of all the advantages of the reading-room, etc. One of them, quite a well-to-do man, but unable to read, was not to be outdone in the presence of strangers, and following the example of others picked up a newspaper, but unfortunately got

it upside down. With the paper in this position his eye caught the advertisement of some steamship company, and of course got the cut of the vessel inverted. Here was something he thought he was quite safe in discussing, for he made sure he could understand a picture, and so he held it up and boldly announced to those around him that the column contained the account of "a dreadful shipwreck." The rest may be imagined. Another, who kept a kind of refitting emporium on the way, was accustomed, in the absence of ability to read or write, to keep his accounts in a book by rough pictures, drawing a horse, or harness, or cart-axle, etc., as required by the transaction, and also some distinctive feature of the man to whom he sold them. On one occasion he was closing accounts with a settler after the season's work, and gave a cheese amongst the things he had furnished to the settler. The settler denied having received a cheese, but the "merchant" produced his book showing the drawing. The settler still denied, but looking up some memoranda he had kept, told the "merchant" that he had not received

a cheese, but had purchased a grindstone with which he was not charged. The "merchant" at once remembered the transaction, and coolly remarked that he had intended the drawing for a grindstone, but "had forgotten to put the hole in it." The delightfully accommodating procedure that could change a cheese into a grindstone by the addition of a pencil-mark is worthy of a destructive Biblical critic who can make a Hebrew letter mean anything his hypothesis demands by changing its vowel point.

And thus in a primitive manner of civil and commercial life did the early settlers live, near the spot where the "bull's-eye" city of Canada now stands, with all the equipment of civic organization, and with such a trade as belongs to a place midway along the greatest railway on the round globe.

CHAPTER IX.

EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES.

FROM the days of John Knox and his parish school, Scottish people have been noted for their interest in education and their intense desire to secure for themselves and their children the priceless boon of mental training. The colony on the Red River would naturally be unable for some years, amid the struggle for existence, to give much scope to this phase of their national character, but from an early date they availed themselves of the school established by the Anglican Church at St. John's. It was not until 1849 that the Scottish settlers had means sufficient to organize a school district of their own. The first teacher was John Inkster, brother of the present sheriff at Winnipeg, and the school was begun in the dwelling-house of

John Flett, one of the settlers. The school, of course, was supported by voluntary contributions, varying according to the means of the people. The amount paid for the teacher's salary averaged about \$150 a year, and the caretaking of the school was done by the pupils, who took turns at sweeping and lighting the fires. Text-books were not numerous. After the elementary reading books were mastered, reading and spelling exercises from the Bible were prescribed, together with the systematic study of the Shorter Catechism. In the writing exercise copy lines were set by the teacher in home-made copy-books, and a care was bestowed upon this part of the work which makes the writing of men of the "old school" look like "copperplate" beside much of our present day scribbling. In arithmetic the one text-book was in the hands of the teacher, who "set" the questions for the pupils on slates (thick as a board and without frames) or on the primitive wooden blackboard, where the writing was done with ungainly lumps of chalk. The children sat on long wooden benches without backs, and

the classes always stood for recitation of the lesson. The practice of "going up" was followed, and as it was a great honor to be "head" and much disgrace to be "tail," solid work was done. Spelling was especially a field of conflict, and in the rivalry for first place the class must have revolved before the teacher with the bewildering changeableness of a kaleidoscope. In the matter of arithmetic, as we have said, the teacher "set" the problem, or read it out to be taken down, and the first pupil done had to show the slate with the completed work. Then followed the clattering of pencils like the sound of runaway horses on a pavement, and we have seen the face of the teacher in imminent danger of disfigurement from the rush of frameless slates to catch his eye. The matter of selecting a teacher was sometimes done at a public meeting, but generally by trustees chosen at such meeting from amongst the settlers. Certificated teachers were, of course, unheard of, and besides oral examinations attended by the whole district, the matter of the success or failure of a teacher was decided by the inspection and report of the

trustees aforesaid. As these trustees were for the most part "plain, blunt men," whose own advantages had been limited and whose "dialect" was more or less affected by Gaelic, Salteaux, Cree and French influences, the lot of the teacher was not always a happy one. When Inkster was teaching in '49, the trustees came in to inspect, and one of them gave to the leading class in the school the word "pekilar" to spell. It had never been heard of up to that time, and so proved a "poser" for the whole class from head to foot, whereupon the trustee grew somewhat indignant and threatened to dismiss the teacher whose leading class could not spell "pekilar." The teacher, however, asked to see the word, and saved his official head by pointing out that it was pronounced "peculiar," which latter word was triumphantly spelled by the class, who thus vindicated the scholarly attainments of their teacher.

Shortly after the school was begun in '49, a log building was erected on the Frog Plain (property granted by Lord Selkirk for church and school purposes), which continued to do duty till

some fifteen years afterwards, when a new stone building was erected under the supervision of the Rev. James Nisbet. The old log building I can remember with the shadowy vagueness of a boy who was taken to church from infancy past its door-way. I can see in a dim way its walls of long logs plastered in the chinks and white-washed, and overhead the thatched and mortar-crowned roof. I have a dim recollection of being within the precincts, and of seeing the long benches down the sides of the room, with the famous "cupboard" in which the meagre school supplies were kept, as well as the wonderful globe for the geography class. I have also an idea that I recall (perhaps I only heard of it) a meeting of the settlers called to discuss the advisability of building a new school, and how one of them, a powerful man, gave ocular demonstration of the unsoundness of the old one by driving his axe to the handle in one of its best remaining logs. Not long after came the opening of the new school, a religious exercise, during which the children marched in twos from the old building to the new, singing as they went

some psalm of degrees. The new building was divided into two rooms, and it was in the "back room" that Manitoba College took shape in 1871 under Dr. Bryce. Up to this era of the college the honor roll of teachers—strong men who battled with difficulties and from whose pupils came many who have made their impress on the history of the country—is as follows: John Inkster, Alexander Matheson, Adam MacBeth, Hector MacBeth, Alexander Ross, James Harper, Alexander Polson and D. B. Whimster, some of whom remain to the present time, but the most of whom have fallen asleep. Verily "they rest from their labors and their works do follow them." During all these years many of the pupils of these men went to eastern institutions of higher learning, and took high rank, while the general result of their labors was such that the intelligence and culture of the isolated colony was a constant surprise to visitors from the outside world. From the time of the Rev. Mr. Black's coming in 1851 (with which we shall deal in another chapter), he gathered out from the school the most capable and ambitious of the

boys, giving them instruction in classics, mathematics and theology, and thus laid the foundations of Manitoba College, which is simply the outgrowth of that parish school and the efforts of Dr. Black. On in the sixties the number of young men who seemed anxious to go on to a higher education than the common schools could give them, became so large that the matter of a college pressed itself more and more upon the settlers. In 1869 Mr. D. B. Whimster, a gentleman of wide experience as a teacher in Ontario, was sent for, and his arrival, marking a new era in the history of the parish school, finally led to the establishment of the Manitoba College at Kildonan, though it was moved to Winnipeg when that place began to assume the lead in the West as its principal town.

Besides the school, there existed amongst the settlers from an early date literary societies for the discussion of all manner of subjects and for social enjoyment. These societies were primitive enough and not without their humorous side. The old question of the comparative usefulness of the horse and the ox was the one on

which the younger members generally cut their debating teeth. We remember, too, how one of them in a discussion as to the comparative destructiveness of fire and water, enthusiastically asserted the injurious superiority of the latter, and clinched his argument by instancing how the flood on the Red River had carried their barn down to Lake Winnipeg and that the fire had never touched it! Recitations in prose and poetry were much in vogue, and special meetings were held sometimes in the schools and sometimes in private houses for their rendition. The old "stand-bys" were well to the fore, and as books were scarce some had to content themselves with one selection, which they gave again and again. The staginess and the mannerisms of the imitative elocutionist were all wanting, but a rugged and forceful eloquence was often developed in these miniature lyceums. Not long ago there appeared before the Presbytery of Winnipeg six members of the Kildonan congregation in the matter of a call to their minister. All these had been trained in those primitive schools and homely

platforms, with whatever additional they could learn by further observation and experience.

As they presented their views in a simple, manly and straightforward way there was distinctly noticeable a rich flavoring of scriptural phrases, a splendid conception of the oneness of the Church, composed though it be of many congregations, a fine ideal of duty, a loyalty to the minister, which caused you to feel that they were sure that he would obey the high dictates of his own conscience as to his course—and all this with a natural eloquence most pleasing to hear. Veterans in the court said afterwards that they had never heard such power and ability evidenced in men of their class—truly a noble tribute to their native industry, to their indomitable perseverance, as well as to those who had been their teachers in the Church and school of the early days.


CHAPTER X.

RELIGIOUS LIFE.

WHEN we write a separate chapter on the religious life of the early settlers, we would not imply that these old people severed the sacred from the secular, for never has there been in our land a more conspicuous consecration of the whole sweep of life than in their case. One of the strongest points in their theology was their clear conception of the immanence and sovereignty of God; hence they never considered themselves beyond His presence or outside His control. When we write a chapter on their religious life, we simply desire to indicate the manner and custom of their religious services as well as to sketch in some degree the story of how they kept the faith during the long years of their isolation. It is quite clear that their

training in Scotland had been of such a kind as to lead them to feel that the exercises of religion must form an integral part of life in the new land, for they made special stipulations before they sailed for a minister of their own Church, and they arranged that an elder who accompanied them should have authority to baptize and to marry. From that time on till the day on which John Black, their first minister, was in their midst, nearly forty years afterwards, they never ceased to importune the authorities, civil and ecclesiastical, on the subject of their own Presbyterian creed, and in their allegiance to that faith they never once failed or faltered. We are not to infer from the mention of this long period without a minister of their own, that they were without settled services during all that time. It goes without saying that with such a people the sacred fire of worship would be kept burning on family altars, and that their cottage prayer-meetings would be held; but in addition, the Anglican Church (partly through the enterprise of their Missionary Society, and partly because favored by

certain of the Hudson's Bay authorities) had a minister upon the ground as early as 1820, and of the services of this Church the Scotch settlers availed themselves. But while doing so these settlers never absolutely gave their adherence to that Church, nor accepted the situation as a fulfilment of the promise made them as to church privileges. All honor, however, ought to be given to the Church of England for the manner in which they accommodated their form of service to meet the known opinions of the colonists on such matters. In their regular worship they omitted largely the use of the Liturgy and Prayer-book, and the psalms were sung in the metre and tune to which the settlers had been accustomed: It has been said by some that the Anglican Church expected by this course ultimately to win these people over to their Church, and thus become the sole Protestant organization in the country, but we could have no sympathy with that view, for several reasons. To begin with, it would be clear to any one acquainted with the nationality and character of the colonists that any such course,



instead of winning them over, would utterly estrange their sympathies. Moreover, the early pastors of the Church of England, meeting the older people in daily converse, would feel they were immovable as rock in the matter of their creed, and that ere the younger generation grew up there would certainly be a minister of their own faith amongst them. Besides all this, the uniformly kind and grateful manner in which the old settlers always spoke of the Anglican clergy leads us to feel that those early pastors were godly men who sought unselfishly to guide and comfort a shepherdless flock in the way of the Cross of Christ. The settlers were not apt to forget their own creed, because they were diligent students of its standard theology. The libraries in the old houses, circulating libraries truly, were not large but weighty. Besides the Bible, the Catechism and Confession of Faith, there were a few leading books of the strongest Puritan flavor, and these were pored over and afterwards discussed with the ease that many people seem now able to bring to bear only on current gossip. People who thus drank from

the fountain-head gained a strength which enabled them to conquer the difficulties of their wilderness life and hold steadfastly the tenets of their own Church with its simple form of worship. Many an incident might be recorded to show the depth and reality of their religious life, and we relate one in the face of present day views of Sabbath observance. A small party of them who had left their families with scanty supply of food, and had gone out on a winter buffalo hunt, were camping one Saturday night along the Pembina Mountains. They had their poor meal of what they brought with them, and gave all they could to their faithful train dogs. Then before retiring to rest under the lee of their toboggans, with the dogs crouched around them in the snow, they held a prayer-meeting to ask Him for food who fed Israel with manna. When they awoke three buffaloes were in the valley below, but it was not until after another prayer-meeting for guidance as to their course on the Sabbath-day that, in view of the necessity and the evident providence, one of their number (an elder in the Church) was appointed by the

rest to procure for the party a present food supply. He approached the buffaloes without difficulty, shot *one*, and though the others remained for a time, as they sometimes will in such a case, he did not shoot again, holding that he was only justified in taking what was actually necessary on the Lord's Day. Some people would describe such conduct as extreme, but that God approves of action true to conscience as the needle to the pole, is evidenced by the signal way in which He was with them through all their trials, even unto a peaceful and prosperous old age.

We have said that the settlers never ceased to importune the authorities, civil and ecclesiastical, for a minister of their own faith; and any one who studies the history of the time will see that they sent petition after petition to the Church at home (some of them never received), showered them upon the Hudson's Bay Company, and incessantly bombarded every prominent officer of that corporation who visited the settlement with reminders of the promise made them. At last the Church in Scotland referred

the matter to the Rev. Dr. Burns, pastor of Knox Church in Toronto; and Mr. Ballenden, then the local governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, urged the matter in the same quarter about the same time, with the result that Dr. Burns secured the appointment of John Black, a graduate of Knox College, then working as a missionary in Lower Canada. After some hesitation as to his duty in the matter, Mr. Black finally accepted the appointment, and after a long and arduous journey, *via* St. Paul, Minnesota, reached Red River in the autumn of 1851, and on his arrival three hundred of the Scotch settlers severed their nominal connection with the Church of England and rallied around the young missionary. Physically, mentally and spiritually, Mr. (afterwards Dr.) Black was the man for the place. No other than a man of great physical endurance could have stood the strain of frontier work as he did for thirty years, and judging from what he was, as I remember him, his compact and strenuous frame gave every indication of his physical strength. Many years after his coming, and when his

dark locks were plentifully whitened with the snows that never melt, we used to supply him at times with hay for winter use (he always kept a few horses and cows), and when we (I was little more than a child helping my brother, or professing to do so) went to deliver the hay, Dr. Black invariably came out from his study and took a hand in unloading the carts to the stack. My brother always gave him the strongest fork, for he would snap the handle of an ordinary one; and it was my delight to see how the minister would bend the fork-handle, and when he had "landed" an exceptionally heavy load, to hear him say that it was a "noble fork," and that the handle was "good stuff."

From the beginning of his ministry he was a man of exceptional mental vigor and of intense spiritual power. With all this he had a vivid imagination and the free use of language, so that his preaching was full of the fire and eloquence so characteristic of the followers of Knox. Like Knox, too, he would sometimes well-nigh "ding the pulpit into blads," for his strong hand could well emphasize upon the


boards of the high desk the vigorous language of his discourse. His voice was clear, strong and full of resonant force, while his accent, once understood, added a rich flavor to every word. As to the subject-matter of his preaching, my whole recollection of it is that above all things else the doctrine of the Blood was made prominent, and that his constant aim was to turn sinners from the error of their way, and build up Christians in the most holy faith. There was no glossing over of sin, no endeavor to blacken into harmless embers the thunder-bolts of God's wrath against iniquity, and no other hope of salvation held out but that by way of the vicarious Cross of Christ. Boy as I was, and too little disposed to appreciate their power, I remember especially his communion services, and to-day I can see his swaying figure and hear the echoing question, "Who can pay that debt?" as in one of them he elaborated the idea of humanity's debt under the law, and the coming of the rescuing Christ to provide for us a ransom. No one could grow up under that ministry without a creed, unless he threw away

his opportunity and trampled underfoot privileges of an exceeding greatness; and however little I may have evidenced benefit received from it at the time, he stood before me as a man whose righteousness I honored, whose memory I revere, and whose influence upon his own and these succeeding days beside the western sun no man with a merely ethical gospel could ever have exerted.

CHAPTER XI.

RELIGIOUS LIFE—Continued.

FROM what we have already said as to the life and ministry of John Black, those who know the type of character such a ministry is calculated to produce in the people, will be able to imagine this chapter and much more than it can contain, even should they not read it at all. But for many who may not have studied in the religious sphere the history of cause and effect, let it be written for the honor of the pastor and the people and for the glory of God. When the missionary came, as we have said, the colonists rallied around him loyally, and once the flood of the following year had gone down and possibilities of permanence became clearer, they set about the work of building the stone church that still stands on the edge of the prairie,



unhurt and impregnable against the warring of the elements. In the building of that church one of the most noticeable things was the absence of all adventitious schemes for providing means, for the people, though poor in money, had a mind to work and opened the church free of debt. Building in those days was no easy or inexpensive task. The stones had to be brought across the prairie some fifteen miles, and were hauled on single sleds with oxen, almost one stone at a time, while all the lumber for floors, roof, pews, etc., had to be sawn by hand in the old-fashioned "saw-pit," in which one man above and another below pursued through the livelong day their tedious and laborious task. Yet in due time the church was finished, with walls between two and three feet thick of stone "rough-casted" on the outside; long pews were made, with a few square ones near the pulpit, the pulpit and precentor's desk were set on high, a gallery was constructed, and the whole work was of such a thorough if rugged kind that it stands unimpaired to this day, except where some alterations have been made. A bell was set

in the high steeple, and there for all these years it has rung out its Sabbath summons across the plain, and has tolled the *requiem* over the young and old who lie buried around the church in the "city of the dead." Knowing something of the rugged strength and ability of many whose dust lies there, and who, had their environment been different, might have made their influence felt beyond their own circle, I never stand within the precincts of that God's acre without thinking on those lines in Gray's "Elegy":


"Some village Hampden who with dauntless breast
The little tyrant of his fields withstood,
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,
Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood."

To the people whose bodies were buried there from the homes around, religion was a real and a vital thing. Thoroughly schooled in the standards of their Church, the Bible above all was their Book, and, undisturbed by any critical theories, they believed it as the Word of God from the sublime "In the beginning" clear through to the last triumphal acclaim of the

Apocalypse. Hence, the Book entered into the very fibre of their being, and gave them an unbending strength in life and infinite comfort down in the death-shade at the close. In the matter of their Church and their minister, though differences of opinion would sometimes arise, loyalty and duty had been their ruling ideas, from church attendance right on to such material support as they were able to give. The church services and the prayer-meetings were religiously attended, and in all kinds of weather and at all seasons the minister was sure of a goodly number whenever the time of service came. To the cottage prayer-meetings, held in the farm-houses on the winter nights by the light of tallow dips, we have seen men come long distances in weather severe enough to make that mode of travel very unpleasant. In their midst John Black stood for all that was true and good, and though the younger people may have felt sometimes that his religion was of a stern type, they knew that he was sternest of all with himself, and hence he was regarded by all the people of the district with a love and reverence almost unbounded.

As an example of his rigid sense of duty, we recall once a literary meeting in which some dialogue was being rendered, and in the course of which some apostrophe to the gods occurred; but when it was to be repeated Dr. Black said, "Please omit those profane expressions"—an incident somewhat disconcerting to the reciters, but characteristic of a man who felt that homage should be paid to one only, the living and true God. As an illustration of the way in which he was revered by all, it is worth while to relate another incident, told by one who was present at the time. A social tea-meeting was in progress in one portion of the settlement, called Little Britain, when a burly half-breed, a man of immense physical strength and, withal, a noted bully, entered in a mischievous state of intoxication, and began by word and act to make things very unsafe for those with whom he came in contact. He was one of those men who become excited almost to madness by liquor, and so all attempts to quiet him only made matters worse, and things were becoming serious when some one thought of Dr. Black being next door. He

was at once sent for, and coming up to the bully put his hand upon his shoulder and called him by name. The man turned fiercely around, but when he saw the venerable face of the minister of Kildonan he sank down with the most profuse promises that he would be quiet, and he kept his word. Verily it must have reminded those present of the fierce demoniac calmed out of his violence at the touch and word of the Christ.




In their religious life the Kildonan people were not demonstrative, but the opposite. Reticence is characteristic of the Scottish nature in any case, and the "bodily exercise" and religious athletics of some present day "evangelistic" methods they did not profess to understand. We remember the first "revival" service held in the old church. Services were being held in the neighboring town of Winnipeg, and when request was made by those in charge to come to Kildonan, Dr. Black, though not, perhaps, much acquainted with the methods to be followed, consented, so as not to stand in the way of possible good to the young people. The regular

service in the church was always conducted with the utmost decorum. At the opening hour the minister, in gown and bands, came slowly up to the pulpit, but I can see the horror and amazement of the people as the "evangelist" came up the aisle pulling off a fur coat and talking volubly about the weather, etc., as he went. At one of the meetings some man from Winnipeg, after a few words, called upon all who were Christians to stand up. No one arose, and when a second and a third appeal were in vain, the man turned to the old minister and said something implying that it was strange he had no Christians there after all those years. An old elder present could stand a good deal, but he could not stand anything like a slur on Dr. Black, and so he arose and addressed the speaker in words to this effect: "There are Christians here, but we do not show our religion in that way. We have not been brought up to it, and what is more we do not want it. If you have a good word of truth for us we will be glad to hear it, but if you have nothing better to say than asking us to stand up you had better sit

down." It is scarcely necessary to say that the method was not followed at subsequent meetings. The elder referred to in this incident is, in many respects, a type of the character produced under Dr. Black's ministry. He stood by his minister equally in all the circle of his work. He faithfully seconded the minister's efforts in pastoral visitation, and to this day is one of the first to be found at any sick-bed of which he hears. Somewhat brusque in manner and somewhat unpolished in address, people need to know him to appreciate him, but where he is best known he is most loved. At prayer-meetings we have known him differ from a later minister, a young man whose staunch friend he was, on the interpretation of a parable (and we are bound to say the elder was right on the point in our view), but no minister who appreciated true worth would resent the opinion of a loving and devoted helper to whom the Bible was the best beloved and the best known of all books. I remember once, in a neighbor's house, assisting a son to place the body of his father in a coffin which this elder had made and brought to the house.

I recall the apparently indifferent manner in which the elder acted and spoke as he was directing us, but the members of that family knew well what a bleeding heart he was hiding under his brusqueness, and how, ere he left their humble dwelling, he would lead them in prayer so that the heavens would seem to open above them in their sorrow.

CHAPTER XII.

MISSIONARY OUTPOSTS.

THE Indian Mission at Prince Albert, on the Saskatchewan (where there are now several thriving churches) was an overflow from the religious and educational life of Kildonan. In 1861 the Rev. James Nisbet came from Oakville, Ontario, to help Dr. Black in the growing work of the West, and after five years in and about the colony, where he is still affectionately remembered, went 500 miles north-westward and founded a mission, to which he gave the name of the Prince Consort. With that mission the old home of the writer was closely connected, for to it there went at that time two sisters and a brother: Mary, the wife of Mr. Nisbet, the missionary; Christina, the wife of John McKay, then the interpreter; and Adam,

who was to teach the school, together with other relatives and connections. When the whites had settled around Prince Albert, John McKay went farther afield as an Indian missionary, and a few personal recollections of James Nisbet and John McKay may fittingly close the present volume.


My earliest recollection of Mr. Nisbet is on the day of my mother's funeral, which took place on my fifth birthday, but some scenes of which are indelibly photographed on my memory. I can see yet the old house crowded, and then the long procession that carried out with it the dust of her whose death made a blank in my life, whose greatness I realized, not then, but more and more as the years have flown. My father, who was heart-broken, was not able to go to the churchyard, but as the funeral procession passed out he went down a little way on the field to have a last look at the coffin borne away on the shrouded bier. I can see him returning bent and in tears. With him was Mr. Nisbet, and as they walked Mr. Nisbet took the Scotch plaid he himself wore

(for it was early winter) and placed it around the stooping shoulders of my father. Even then it impressed itself on my mind as a thoughtful, kind act, but as I grew in years and knew Mr. Nisbet more intimately, I feel that it was a pre-eminently spontaneous deed, and thoroughly characteristic of one who to the end of his days was a "son of consolation." I next remember him at the carpenter's bench, engaged in making the desks for the present Kildonan school, one day on which I was sent for him from his home, failing an elder messenger. I can see him, hatless and coatless, with the beads of perspiration on his brow, doing his own work and directing the other workmen how to follow the plans he had prepared. Next I can remember vaguely (for all these intermittent photographs are not equally distinct) the preparation for the outgoing to the Indian mission, and on the day of the departure I recall seeing my sister, Mrs. Nisbet, in the old home, giving a glass of milk to their eldest born, little more than an infant, with whom they were setting out on a wagon and cart journey they knew

not whither. There, in that Indian mission, Mr. Nisbet toiled, erecting buildings with his own hands, teaching and preaching as he had opportunity, struggling amidst the lights and shadows of a difficult life, till he and his wife returned to my father's house utterly broken down by the strain of their labors, and died there only a few days apart. During the years at Prince Albert they made several trips home, and one winter was spent in Oakville, where his sisters lived, and where he left two of his children at school; but the journeys across the great plains were more wearing almost than the work at the mission. It would appear from the experience of Mr. Nisbet that the best people in the world are liable to be misunderstood—the servant is not greater than his Lord—for even when his life was being slowly worn away by his missionary toil, certain people, in the press and elsewhere, made attacks on his method of work at the mission. I remember well how heavily this lay upon him, and with what warmth of conscious innocence he publicly and privately defended his course and the action of those associated

with him. Next I recall, his coming back to my father's house for the last time, both he and his wife worn out and run down as those who had worked beyond their strength and time. They had both been ill before they left Prince Albert, and the long trip of 500 miles across the prairie in the jolting canvas-covered wagons was a trying one even to people who were strong. When they arrived, Mr. Nisbet, though weaker than any one knew, was riding slowly in front on horseback, while his wife was in the wagon just behind. He rode up to the door and dismounted, and I remember well how he tried to engage my father's attention, and stood between him and the wagon when my brother went and carried from it the frail body of my sister, who was scarcely able to put her arms about his neck as he lifted her from that poor bed and carried her into the old home to die. For her the end was not long delayed, and after she had lost consciousness I remember how calmly, to outward appearance, her husband waited for the end, counting her feeble pulse-beats with his watch in hand, while all the


while the sword of a great sorrow was slowly piercing through his heart. When all was over the husband rose, and as he and my father stood together I remember how Mr. Nisbet said, "I hope you all feel that I acted for the best when I brought Mary back home," and the answer of my father, whose heart had yearned to see her ere he died, need not be recorded. Long years before he, too, had stood beside a Mary (that was my mother's name); and had watched the passing of her spirit into the unseen, where his gaze was fixed with a growing home-sickness as the shadows, were lengthening around him and the ties of earth were being broken one by one. Not many days after that Mr. Nisbet gave way before the brief illness that carried his frail life out also. His room was in one end of the big farm-house, and when he fell ill at night no one knew of it till the daybreak, for all had thought that he but needed rest to restore him to full strength. In the morning, as he came out to the dining-room, I recall how he told of suffering during the night, and how he, who always looked for



opportunities to enforce the teaching of the Word, said, "I can understand now what the Psalmist meant when he said, 'My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning, yea, more than they that watch for the morning.'" A few days later he died of a diphtheritic trouble, which his weakened system could not resist, and in the newly-covered grave of his wife his dust was laid to rest. Over them the General Assembly of 1887 erected a granite column, such as their relatives, poor in worldly goods, had never hoped to see, but in the immeasurable influence they exerted on many whose lives have been consecrated to the service of God, in the noble record of their self-denying labors, and in the enduring work at Prince Albert, we see their grandest and divinest monument.


Beside Mr. Nisbet, as we look back along the line of our church history in the West, we see the figure of the late Rev. John McKay, at one time the interpreter and general provider at Prince Albert, and latterly the missionary on the Mistawasis Reserve, near Fort Carleton.

From my earliest childhood I remember his physical appearance and the characteristics which made him so successful in the Indian work. A powerfully-built man, with great breadth of shoulder and immense depth of chest, muscular and athletic, dark-skinned and raven-haired, with aquiline nose and piercing black eyes—his whole physical make-up commended him to the Indians, who adore physical strength and prowess. Moreover, he was of the half-blood—his father Scotch, his mother a pure Cree—and united in himself the courage and energy of the white with the skill and endurance of the Indian. This made him one of the class whose presence in this country has been invaluable as, standing midway between the white and the red man, they constituted a medium of communication and a guarantee of good faith that led to peaceful solutions of the questions that arose between them. In the case of John McKay himself, every one who is familiar with the history of this country knows how he assisted the late Governor Morris in arranging the Indian treaties in the West, and in securing



a peace and good-will that would have been impossible without his help and the help of men of his class. Down to the time of death he retained an unrivalled influence over the Indians, as witnessed by the fact that in 1885, though the rebellion broke out at Duck Lake, not far from the Reserve, the old chief Mista-wasis not only resisted the incitement of Riel's runners and remained loyal, but with a picked band of men escorted the missionary's family to Prince Albert, and there offered his services to the Government. When John McKay first went to Prince Albert his main duty was to supply the mission with the products of the chase, and since he had been used to the prairie from his childhood, he found this a congenial task. He was an experienced buffalo hunter and a dead shot, though I often heard him express his abhorrence of the way in which the buffalo were slaughtered for the love of gain by hunters, who simply took the tongue and hide of the slain animal. All these qualities, with his intimate acquaintance with the language and customs of the Indians, gave him unbounded

control over them in ways which proved of great service in all lines of his work. The possession of courage is always a sure passport to the respect of the Indians, and that John McKay had that courage they were taught in a great many ways. In the earlier days of Prince Albert, roving bands of strange Indians used frequently to come to the mission and make heavy and peremptory demands for food on the meagre supply, with threats of extermination if they were not satisfied. One spring, when preparations were on hand for the sowing season, and the oxen were tied in the hay-yard, a large crowd of Indians from a distance came and demanded an ox for a feast. One young animal was given them, but after a while they came back, and indicating a certain ox, the choicest and biggest of all, and hence the most prized for the spring work, they requested that he be given them. The demand was refused—for to give way there meant, to any one who knows the Indian, a giving way all around—and explanation made that this ox could not be spared. But the Indians “uncoated” their



guns, strung their bows, and with violent demonstrations (such as they calculate will frighten people), said they were going to take the ox in any case. McKay reasoned with them as long as he could, but in vain, and when further parley was useless, he stepped within his door and returned rifle in hand. Indicating a certain post between the Indians and the coveted ox, he spoke to them as follows: "I have your blood in my veins and you are my brothers; but I have also the blood of the white, and therefore I am more prudent than you are. We must have food here for our families, and cannot give away all our animals, or we cannot sow our fields. We have always done, and will always do our best for you; but now, I have drawn a line at that post; you know my rifle never misses, and I tell you that the first man who crosses that line will drop." None of them made the attempt, and from that time onward McKay had more influence over them than ever before.

Some years afterwards, when Prince Albert became largely a white settlement, he moved

out to the Mistawasis Reserve (for his heart was in the Indian work), was ordained by permission of the Assembly a minister of the Gospel, and ministered there till his death with great success. He was a natural-born orator, and had all the dramatic eloquence of the Indian with the fire and intenseness of the Celt. The old chief Mistawasis was his sworn friend; and the work done on the reserve has on it the stamp of enduring reality. An incident I heard him relate on his last visit to Kildonan has always seemed to me a striking instance of the way in which the psalmody and hymnology of the Church attests its oneness. After the 1885 rebellion a number of the loyal chiefs, amongst them Mistawasis and his old friend Star Blanket, were taken to the East, and were greatly impressed with the evidences of power and progress they saw in the haunts of the white man. On his return, Mistawasis met John McKay at Qu'Appelle, and they spent the night together. Mainly, their talk was on religious work, and Mistawasis told the missionary how they had attended some great meeting and

afterwards were invited to a reception in the home of one of the Christian workers. The chief said there were many ladies and gentlemen present who sang and played on "singing machines" (pianos), and that finally they asked him and Star Blanket to sing. "I thought," said Mistawasis, "I should have sunk into the ground for bashfulness, but I said to Star Blanket that we must sing after all their kindness to us. I told him we would sing the church song the missionary taught us, and so we began, but what do you think? I had scarcely begun when one of the ladies ran to the singing machine and began to play, and all the people joined in the same song, but I was leading the whole band. Now what puzzles me is how these people there knew the same church song we sing away out on the prairie." The explanation the missionary gave, and which greatly delighted the chief, was that God's children are everywhere a singing people, because their hearts are glad, and that the song was the 100th psalm which they had learned in Cree to the

old tune, and which the people in the East had learned in English to the same.

John McKay died a few years since as the result of exposure to the great hardships of his life on the plains, but his influence for good lives on amongst the dusky tribes of the Saskatchewan.